DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 225 236 - EA 015 226

AUTHOR	Schenet, Margot A.
TITLE	State Education Agency Coordination Efforts. Summary Report.
INSTITUTION	Urban Inst., Washington, D.C.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	Sep 82
CONTRACT	400-80-0014
NOTE	21p.; Project Report, Urban Institute Project No. 1449. For related document, see EA 015 225.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Agency Cooperation; Agency Role; Case Studies; *Coordination; Educational Cooperation; Educational Finance; Elementary Secondary Education; Federal State Relationship; *Financial Problems; Human Services; Special Education; *State Agencies; State Aid; *State Departments of Education; State Programs; *State School District Relationship; Statewide Planning

ABSTRACT

A study of state education agency (SEA) activities investigated the incentives and disincentives to coordination and interagency cooperation at the state level as well as the effects of federal initiatives and recent fiscal strains on these activities. Research focused on how much coordination currently exists nationwide; case studies of Pennsylvania, Colorado, California, and Washington examined whether the level of resources has an impact on the amount of coordination taking place, and the local impact of coordination. Across the 50 states very little coordination exists between education and other state agencies providing human services. Intensive interviews with key personnel in the four states revealed coordination efforts to be minimal among programs within education agencies. In none of the four cases did declining resources spur agency initiatives for coordination, though state legislatures did push agencies in the direction of greater coordination. Finally, formal agreements at the state level do not determine the extent of joint activities at the local level. Only SEAs that use interagency agreements to establish working relationships between local offices of social and health service agencies and local school districts are likely to have an impact on local operations. (MLF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

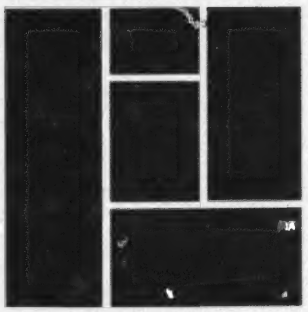
ED225236

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.



THE URBAN INSTITUTE

2100 M Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20037

Project Report

EA 015 226

SUMMARY REPORT:

STATE EDUCATION AGENCY COORDINATION EFFORTS

MARGOT A. SCHENET

SEPTEMBER 1982

Summary Report prepared under Contract No. NIE-400-80-0014
for the National Institute of Education, UI Project No. 1449.

THE URBAN INSTITUTE
2100 M Street, N.W., Washington, D. C. 20037

INTRODUCTION/RESEARCH ISSUES

This report summarizes the findings from an 18-month study of state education agency activities to coordinate programs for children and youth. The incentives and disincentives to coordination and interagency cooperation at the state level were investigated, as well as how federal initiatives and recent fiscal strains affected these activities. Based on a review of the theoretical and research literature on coordination and fiscal stress, a number of questions and hypotheses were developed. The research effort and data collection focused on the following questions. First, how much coordination currently exists? Are there any state level variables that explain differences between states in the extent to which the SEA works with other agencies, or in the extent to which state and federal programs are coordinated? Second, does the level of resources have an impact on the amount of coordination taking place? Does coordination decline or diminish when funds are cut? Does SEA behavior in response to cuts parallel that predicted from models of general purpose governments responses to fiscal stress? A third major question is what is the local impact of coordination? Does administrative coordination at the state level impinge on school district operations, are they aware of state interagency agreements? When coordination increases or declines, do services change or is the impact primarily administrative--accounting procedures, recordkeeping, application forms--and not in the classroom? To guide the research, the following hypotheses were suggested by our synthesis of the theoretical and conceptual literature:

1. The bureaucratic isolation of the state education agency parallels its political separation.

A barrier to coordination has been the well-developed ideology and entrenched political processes that have separated educational government from general government. The separate election of state superintendents of education, for example, frequently means these incumbents are not attuned to bureaucratic politics within the executive agencies. The SEA is consequently isolated from the larger social policy group in the state.

2. Very little coordination exists that requires interagency agreements.

3. Existing interagency coordination is almost always a result of federal requirements or special demonstration projects rather then originating out of ongoing operations.

4. Without extra funds or increasing funds, coordination and interagency agreements fall apart.

   Coordination is basically an administrative vehicle for the allocation of resources.

5. The funding sources and mix of these sources is less important to coordination than whether the level of resources is going up or down.

6. As education funds decline, coordination among programs within education will decline, while efforts may be made to increase interagency coordination as part of burden-shifting strategies.

7. When cuts in the budgets of functional agencies other than education are more severe (or their budgets decline and education doesn't), then programs for services in the schools will be cut by these agencies first.

   Interagency agreements will be terminated because these programs do not serve the main clients and are regarded as ancillary both by other agencies and the SEAs.

8. Where coordination exists among programs within education, resource declines may have less impact on services.

   Coordinated programs may protect services, but this will depend on whether both federal and state revenues are declining.

9. Where all programs within education are cut equally, there will be an incentive to continue coordination so that savings can be shared.

10. Where programs receive differential cuts, the incentives will favor competition.

11. Much of the coordinative activity at the SEA level has little impact on service delivery: within department coordination is frequently administrative with no attempt to change service delivery patterns within school districts; interagency relationships result in transferring functions so that it is not perceived as coordination at the local level.

12. Local school districts seldom take the initiative in coordination: within education, various special program requirements are seen as state and/or federal responsibilities, while with respect to other service agencies, these programs are usually not locally administered.

In order to explore the first question of the extent of current coordination efforts, a review of information from all fifty states was undertaken. The basic data collection strategy to explore the other questions and hypotheses described above was comparative case studies. While hypotheses could not be fully specified and tested, the systematic comparison of four cases allowed us to examine key variables and relationships identified by the research design. At the same time, the case studies provided the flexibility to explore new factors and alternative explanations. The primary source of information for the case studies was the data gathered from intensive interviews with key actors in each of the four states.

With only four cases, complicated selection procedures were not called for. We selected sites that would provide variation on the extent of coordination within education and between education and other service areas. Other characteristics that we attempted to vary among the sites included the existence of a general interagency coordinating unit, size of student population, selection method for CSSO, fiscal measures, and two indices of educational policy-making-centralization and innovation. The four sites selected on these bases were Pennsylvania, Colorado, California, and Washington. The rest of this report summarizes the findings from these four cases and presents conclusions about state education agency coordination efforts.

SUMMARY

Fiscal Conditions

As is true for the country as a whole, the fiscal conditions in the four case study states--Pensylvania, Colorado, Washington and California--have not been good, although considerable variation emerged among the four sites. Washington is at one extreme; a severe recession in the basic industries on which the state depends has led to major shortfalls in state revenues and a proposed 8.2% further reduction across-the-board in departmental budgets. California, for the first time, has begun to experience similar if less severe fiscal constraints. In the current fiscal year, state spending increased by a very small amount (4½%) and agency operating budgets were actually cut by 2%. In Pennyslvania, unused surplus funds were still available to balance the state budget. State agency budget increases were not, however, sufficient to keep pace with inflation. Even in Colorado, where increases averaged 3-5% and an overall budget surplus existed, state agencies felt a fiscal pinch because of expenditure limit legislation and rising inflation.

If we look specifically at education funding, however, a somewhat different picture presents itself, particularly as compared with other human services involved in coordinative efforts. In all four states, as is true generally, education receives the lion's share of state own source revenues/general fund budgets. Elementary and secondary education alone comprised 31% (California) to 43% (Colorado) of state expenditures, while all other social and health services combined seldom reached as high as 1/3 of the

budget and amounted to less than 25% in Colorado. Washington was the only state in which there was an absolute cut in education aid, however it was reduced only 2% while other departments experienced reductions over 10% in some cases. Washington also combined a variety of state categorical education programs into a single state block and reduced the overall total somewhat. However, state spending for special education was up more than 15%. Thus there has been a considerable contrast between the impact of fiscal conditions on education and other human services. California provides something of a contrast. Both Proposition 13 and the state bailout measures had resulted in greater state expenditures in virtually every human services area with state education spending increasing even more than others because of school finance reform. However, in the current fiscal year, education received a smaller increase in appropriations than other health and welfare programs. Yet within education, state compensatory program funding increased by a sizeable amount (12%) and special education also increased. In both Colorado and Pennsylvania there were fewer differences between departments; in both states, education expenditures rose by about 5% overall, with other departments increasing slightly less. In both states, the general perception was that all human services agencies shared equally in the fiscal crunch, although special education did stand out in these states as well, receiving a greater increase than the overall average.

The four states also varied a great deal on the extent to which the state shoulders the burden for the total costs of elementary/secondary education. While all four share a commitment to at least the rhetoric of

local control, there was a big difference in the percentage of total K-12 revenues from state sources. In Colorado and Pennsylvania, the state share is less than half--approximately 42% in Colorado, 40% in Pennsylvania. In both Washington and California, on the other hand, school finance reform cases and other issues have led to the state assuming most of the total costs--76% in Washington and 79% in California. It should be noted, however, that the state share of total expenditures appears to have little relationship to the proportional size of the state education bureaucracy. SEA size appears to be much more a function of overall state population with very small staff in Colorado and Washington and a much larger administrative organization in California and Pennsylvania.

Coordination Among Education Programs

Of the four states studied, only California has put major emphasis on internal coordination. However, each of the other three state departments of education have made some efforts in this direction. Generally, internal coordination among education programs is usually linked to school improvement and/or general planning processes at the local district or individual school level. State agency staff activities emphasize technical assistance efforts to smooth the way. In California, the effort is a major one, involving an entire division of state staff (Consolidated Programs) that reviews local district and individual school plans, provides feedback and conducts site visits to review progress--all in an effort to provide a context and procedures for coordination at the local level. In Colorado, the focus has been on encouraging the integration of a few programs at the local level through the School Improvement planning process. Educational program coordination has also been encouraged at the district level in Washington and Pennsylvania, but in both states the SEA has made less effort to establish specific

procedures or develop a framework or mechanisms within which the program coordination might be accomplished. The state role has been focused primarily on regulatory issues and clarifying particular regulations if locals chose to coordinate separate categorical programs. Thus, for example, the Washington Department of Public Instruction developed a set of policies to deal with the "interface" between separate categorical programs, while Pennsylvania's Office of Policy Management performs a "central clearance" function for separate program regulations review. In none of the four states has much effort or concern been directed to formal communications mechanisms among program units at the state level. Even in the case of the two major federal categorical programs--P.L. 94-142 funds for education of the handicapped and Title I funds for compensatory education, few relationships have been formalized at the state level. Although there is a potential for service and client overlap, this has not been a major issue in any of the four states. In each, some effort had been made to clarify the eligibility of students for each program's services and under what conditions students could be served by both, but beyond this clarification of responsibilities, ongoing, joint activities were not considered by program staff at the state level.

Three of the four states in our study have also taken some steps in the direction of consolidation of state categorical funds, as perhaps an alternative to or further step in integrating programs at the local level. Pennsylvania has never emphasized categorical funding and recently eliminated the urban aid factor in its basic aid formula which had provided additional funds to the Philadelphia school district for compensatory programs. California has passed legislation that allows the complete integration of eleven sources of funds at the school level, including the waiver of various

requirements for advisory councils and separate accounting procedures. In Washington, the state actually transformed a variety of formerly categorical state programs into a state block for "special needs" children, allowing local school districts to decide which programs to fund an approach very similar to the new federal block--Chapter Two.

As might have been expected, the main difficulty these four states encountered in adjusting to the new federal consolidated programs was with the elimination of ESAA, which provided large amounts of money to a few districts. In two of the four states, an effort was made to provide some special relief to former ESAA districts. Washington provided a special set-aside for desegregating districts and California used a special formula to phase out ESAA funding over a two year period. Because the federal legislation made it clear that states could not specify how districts allocated the funds among programs, states were able to divert or deflect special interests from any strenuous lobbying efforts at the state level.

Interagency Coordination

The four case study states provided illustrations of different types of formal human services policy coordinating bodies. Pennsylvania and Colorado have similar mechanisms, really subcabinet groups, formed by the respective Governors to bring the human services agencies together. These committees have functioned less to develop joint activities and shared actions than to provide a forum for communications with and access to the Governor. In both states, where the state education department was involved in interagency agreements, these shared efforts arose independent from the formal body. In Pennsylvania, the Human Resources Commission acted as an information--sharing forum and to some extent, a PR mechanism for the Governor, The Colorado Council did serve as a means for the Governor's initiation of policy

proposals that covered more than two agencies. The four cases do make clear that these formal groups only work when the Governor is involved and where multiagency concerns are at stake. The experiences in California, at least, point in this direction. Without top executive branch involvement the ill-fated "Master Plan" and even the legislatively mandated coordination function of the Governor's planning office have had little effect.

The general enthusiasm for interagency efforts also varied considerably among the four cases. Pennsylvania state education personnel tended to view coordination activities as a burden rather than an opportunity, while in Washington it seemed somewhat irrelevant given the extent to which actual arrangements were left up to local school districts. Colorado's Superintendent and most staff appeared to be unusual in their enthusiastic support for and initiatives to develop joint activities with other human service agencies. California, in turn, reflected all of these perspectives, depending on which programs/agencies and education staff were involved.

Three types of interagency agreements occurred in the four cases: 1) agreements about program standards--promises to adopt common criteria for providing services; 2) agreements about the allocation of resources; and 3) process and activity agreements--promises about uniform processes, forms and activities by agencies. By far the most common were agreements about standards and delineation of program criteria and responsibilities. In all four states, the most prevalent area for interagency agreements was issues related to the services provided to handicapped children. The impetus for these activities was the federal mandate to education in P.L. 94-142 and the related push from the federal level for interagency agreements. These agreements concerning special education tended to be of two types--those that divided up the responsibilities by clarifying which agency provided services

and which determined eligibility and those that specified a change in fiscal responsibilities. As might have been expected because of the P.L. 94-142 mandate, some efforts to shift all the fiscal burden for certain services to the education agency did take place. In these situations, negotiating agreements tended to be more difficult. In both Pennsylvania and California, special education directors felt the federal legislation placed serious burdens on education and made the process of developing interagency agreements more difficult. They felt that placing the legal responsibility with the education system allowed other agencies an opportunity to unfairly abandon their own fiscal and service responsibilities. Interestingly, these are also the two larger states that tended to have more traditional and bureaucratic patterns of relationships among state-level agencies. Apparently, the federal legislation was less of a burden for developing interagency agreements related to special education in Colorado and Washington. These two states illustrate two other patterns for special education coordination activities. In Colorado, the state staff has actively sought out other agencies and been willing to assume more of the costs in order to go beyond a clarification of standards to the development of joint activities and services. Washington, on the other hand, spelled out little at the state level but assumed fiscal responsibilities and allowed individual local districts to establish their own agreements and arrangements for services to handicapped children.

The other substantive policy areas in which interagency coordination efforts took place varied across the four states. Some agreements with the state health authorities seemed to be commonplace, usually because the health department needed to use the school system to achieve health-related goals. The education agency did take the initiative in two of the states when public

attention focused on a particular issue--teenage drug and alcohol abuse and prevention programs in the schools. Prior to the public outcry, however, neither state education agency had placed much priority on cooperation with health departments to promote such programs.

HYPOTHESES REVISITED

This section reviews some of the hypotheses with which we began this research and suggests revisions or expansions based on the case study analyses. The first hypothesis suggested that the separate election of chief state school officers and their resulting political isolation contributed to the difficulties of education agencies in coordinating with other state human services programs. The initial telephone survey found no relationship between method of selection of the CSSO and interagency activity and this seems confirmed by the case studies. California does provide an example where the independence of the Superintendent apparently made it more difficult to work with other human services agencies, particularly in relations with the state legislature. Yet, even in California, legislative coalitions could be achieved as was evidenced by the coordinating committee on youth employment initiated by vocational education. It appeared from the California experiences that the independence of the SEA made negotiation of interagency agreements that reallocated resources particularly difficult. Because education did not come within the purview of the Governor's financial control, these fiscal issues frequently got taken to the legislative arena for resolution. On the other hand, Washington provided on opposite example. The Superintendent is separately elected; nevertheless, the SEA has worked closely with the Department of Social and Health Services, and even, in a recent instance, developed a joint position on legislation concerning the operation of state schools and each department's respective fiscal

responsibility.

Perhaps one of the patterns that emerges concerns less the separation of education within the executive branch and more the impact of executive/legislative branch splits on coordination efforts among state agencies. In Colorado, for example, there was a Democratic Governor and Republican legislature, and even though the Superintendent of Education was separately appointed by the state board, the need to develop a common front in facing a hostile legislature was a strong impetus for joint efforts and agreements between the SEA and other state agencies.

Another related hypothesis was that the impetus for coordination was more likely to be found in external pressures, federal requirements or regulations and/or special funds for coordination, rather than in every day operations. This did seem to be the case in the four states we studied. However, another external motivation was present in three of the four cases. In these states, the state legislature initiated coordination efforts, and pushed state agencies to work together because of concerns about rising costs. In Colorado and California, the escalating costs of special education and the legislature's worry that handicapped children were being counted twice for services received once provided an impetus for agency agreements on fiscal and service responsibilities. In Washington, a similar example was the legislature's proposals with respect to the operation of state schools for the Blind and Deaf. Another external impetus that sometimes brought agencies together was public concern about some problem in the schools, such as teenage drug and alcohol abuse. In Colorado and Pennsylvania, this pushed the SEA into initiating interagency efforts that had previously languished for lack of interest. Where coordination has arisen out of ongoing operations, it appeared that other human services agencies were more

likely to initiate efforts than the education bureaucracy. The pattern was illustrated by the typical relationships between health agencies and the SEA; in most of the cases, the health department needed to work through the school system to accomplish its objectives and provided funds and most of the effort, with education permitting activities and providing support.

A series of hypotheses developed from the literature reviews were related to the impact of the level of resources and fiscal situation of agencies on interagency coordination. No clear cut pattern with respect to this issue emerged from the case studies. We did find that perceptions about other agencies' funding had more relevance than actual dollar amounts or proportional cuts or increases. Overall, education was not feeling a serious pinch in any of the four states, despite major shortfalls in two of the four. On the other hand, education was not funded significantly differently than other human services functions in any state except Washington. In Washington, other agencies were cutback much more, yet ongoing coordinative relationships continued.

Relative funding levels seemed to be an important factor in only one area--special education and related services. Special education costs have been growing at a greater rate than most other education programs or other human services agency budgets. That fact combined with federal legislation which gave the legal responsibility to the education system to provide services to handicapped children did result in other agency efforts to shift the costs and frequently even service provision responsibilities to the schools, making coordination more difficult. This was, however, to a considerable extent, counteracted by the growing concern within state legislatures to stem the tide of increasing costs for the handicapped. As noted above, this led to legislative pressure on agencies to reach agreements on fiscal

and service responsibilities. It is interesting to note, however, that the two states where special education units felt the federal mandate had created serious problems because of other agencies efforts to shift burdens were also the two states (Pennsylvania and California) where special education funding was not rising significantly faster than education or other human services generally.

In the four states we studied, whether special education or other program areas were involved, interagency agreements have not been administrative vehicles for the allocation of resources, as we originally suggested. Funding issues are the most difficult to resolve and were frequently ignored. Instead, the most common pattern was for interagency agreements to present specific and careful descriptions of each agency's separate responsibilities, to avoid getting in each others' way. Coordination was quite often viewed as a way to resolve problems of interference in each other's operations--no problems, no efforts to coordinate or interagency agreements. Interagency coordination that actually established shared procedures and joint activities was very rare.

A somewhat different picture prevailed with respect to coordination among programs within the education arena. Where such efforts existed, they seemed to be motivated by a genuine concern for increasing the quality of services and improving the use of existing resources. SEA efforts were directed towards allowing local districts and even individual schools to integrate programs in order to improve the entire educational offering. This is just the opposite of the focus on separate responsibilities and functions in the interagency area. California and Washington had made the most extensive efforts in this direction. In California, fiscal issues were kept totally separate from program coordination within the Consolidated Programs division.

The next step, to merge funding streams, was recently also established as an option in California. This consolidation was accomplished statewide in Washington with the passage of a state block grant for "special needs" children. In both cases, integration or consolidation efforts encompassed state categorical programs only. In Colorado, some success had been achieved in coordinating several small federal funding sources, but in this case, state programs were not included. This may not be surprising, but it certainly reconfirms the view that federal program requirements frequently make joint efforts difficult to accomplish. Even in California, where Title I was included in the consolidated programs, federal regulations necessitated keeping accounting procedures, advisory groups and reporting procedures separated.

In the original list of hypotheses, a final series were related to the nature of state agency vs. local school district roles in coordination efforts. While the case study investigations did not focus on local school district operations, the research did provide some information on local initiatives with other agencies and the impact of state interagency agreements on local schools. The patterns in the four cases clearly suggest that real coordination must be locally arranged. That is, interagency agreements developed at the state level cannot usually spell out the details for shared activities and processes. The SEA role in this type of coordination was to establish a framework for joint activities through the interagency agreements worked out at the state level. The SEA's in the four states varied widely in the extent of their efforts to establish uniform mechanisms through which local districts could pursue coordination. These ranged from the elaborate procedures in Colorado, including statewide meetings of local staff from education and other human services agencies, to Washington's laissez faire

approach, where no procedures were specified and local districts allowed to work out arrangements on their own with local institutions and other service providers within their boundaries. The four states also varied in the extent to which other human services agencies had some degree of local independence. Even within one state, the organizational structure might vary between child welfare and mental health, with one county-administered and another program state-administered, so that no single pattern emerged for all services. The overall impression, however, was that while states can effectively serve to assist and facilitate interagency coordination, it has to be implemented at the local level. State variables may not be relevant for examining patterns of interagency coordination given the variation within states among local school districts and between the administrative hierachies of different human services agencies.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

This study began with a focus on three research questions:

- How much coordination currently exists?
- Does the level of resources have an impact on the amount of coordination taking place?
- What is the local impact of state coordination efforts?

As we have seen, across the fifty states, very little coordination exists between education and other state agencies providing human services. Coordination efforts among programs within education agencies also appear to be minimal. Even in the four case study states selected because of their coordination activities, less was going on than might have been expected. In some states, their small size enabled them to communicate informally, so that the lack of formal agreements was somewhat deceiving. In the larger states, coordination appeared to be more difficult to accomplish at all. To a

considerable extent, the picture is of state education agencies that remain isolated from the politics of the social policy arena and seldom build a united front with other human services agencies.

The second question proved difficult to answer because of the lack of fiscal stress felt by state education agencies, even in states such as Washington and California where the general state financial picture was quite bleak. However, it would appear that the level of resources alone was not a sufficient guide to the behavior of agencies involved in coordination efforts. In none of the four cases did declining resources provide a spur to agency initiatives for coordination. On the other hand, overall revenue shortfalls and concerns about escalating costs did provide the impetus for state legislatures to push agencies in the direction of greater coordination. The fiscal stress models remain more appropriate for examining the responses of general purpose units of government than of bureaucratic units. It did appear that efforts to cut joint programs or activities or to shift costs or services to other agencies were less common than might have been anticipated, even in the special education arena where other agencies had a legal mandate to point to.

Finally, it seems clear that formal agreements at the state level, regardless of their substance, do not determine the extent of joint activities at the local level. Even in the two states where the major share of funds came from state sources, state agencies could only set the stage for local coordination efforts, not specify or determine its extent. The state department can, however, make a difference by the amount of technical assistance, guidance and general encouragement it provides to local districts in coordination efforts with other agencies. SEAs' can use interagency agreements to establish working relationships between local offices of social

and health service agencies and local school districts. Where they do so, the SEA efforts are likely to have an impact on local operations. Where interagency agreements are developed at the state level with little or no follow-up or assistance to local districts, local schools may not even be aware of SEA efforts.